V.S. Rahi
A GIFTED PAINTER

Text & Photographs: N.K. SAREEN

Virendra Singh Rahi is one of India's very senior, respected and renowned traditional painters who firmly believes in preserving, promoting and enhancing our cultural heritage through his drawings and paintings. At the ripe age of seventy, he is busy painting a series on *Bhagwad Gita*, one of the best known religious texts on human relationships and social behaviour. He is also working on another series of paintings on *Geet Govinda*, a poet's treatise on love.

Being the Vice President of the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society (AIFACS), New Delhi, Rahi has been a dedicated art teacher and adviser on the subject to the Government of India. He has also written on art and literature and contributed poetry to various publications, newspapers and magazines during his long and illustrious career.

Virendra Singh was born in August, 1929, in Hamirpur in Uttar Pradesh. He is the youngest of seven children of Thakur Gopal Singh, who, despite being a *zamindar* (landlord) had literary leanings. He, along with his wife, had also actively participated in the freedom movement of India.

Young Virendra Singh, endowed with a good height and excellent

"Kathputli" – a painting by Rahi.

Above: *"Sukh-Dukh ki Gatha"* (sharing of life's ups and downs). Left: "Johar" dance.

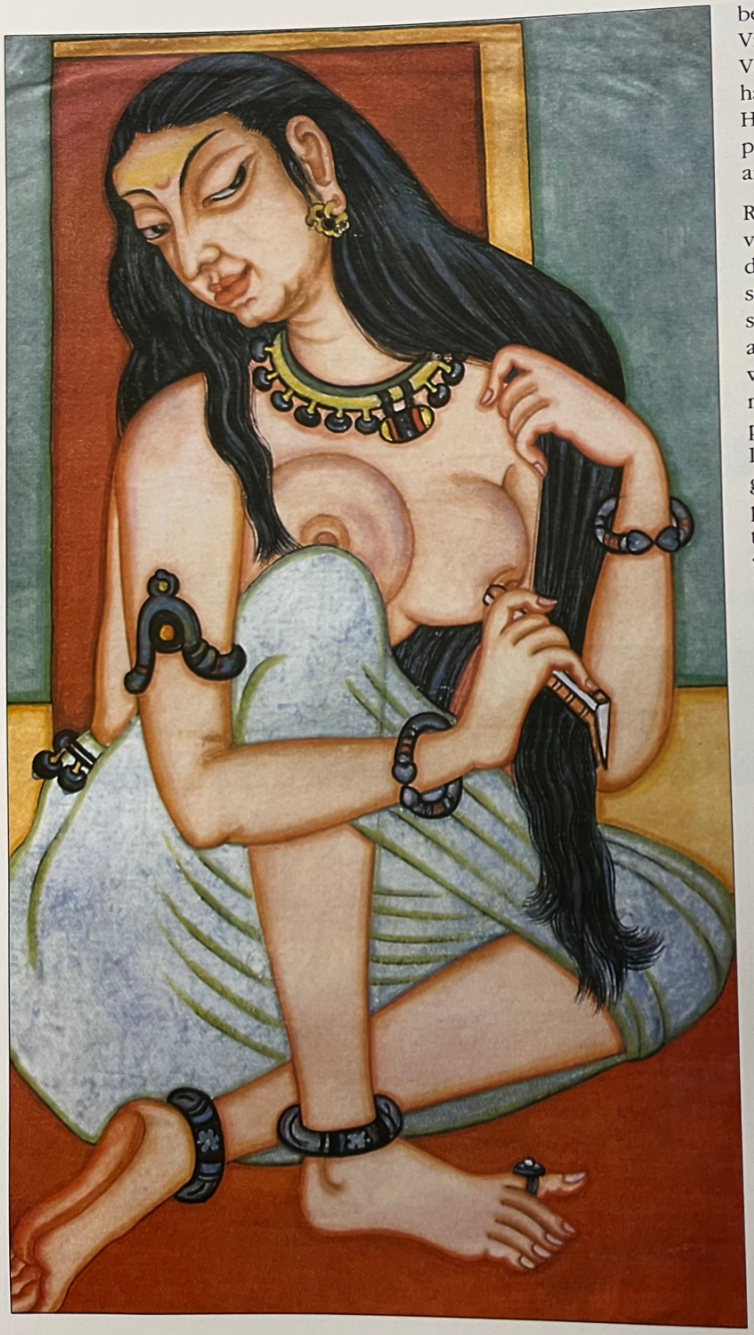
physique, frequently participated in wrestling bouts. Thakur Gopal Singh's patriotic zeal compelled him to ask his youngest son to join the Indian army. However, Virendra Singh never liked the idea and spent most of his time on drawing and spoiling the walls of his house. Rahi now recalls that while his mother encouraged him to follow his favourite subject, his father always discouraged him. Moreover, nobody in those days had ever heard of any professional painter in India. It was either a pastime for the rich and famous like Raja Ravi Verma or it was simply a menial

"Shravan Yatra"

job of signboard writing. Rahi recollects that it was his love for art, fuelled by his wanderlust, that really forced him to rebel against his father and run away from home in search of fulfilling his own dream and lead his life the way he wanted.

He was only fourteen or fifteen when he first landed in Ajmer in Rajasthan and then in Jaipur doing odd jobs, sometimes even working as a labourer to support himself. Undeterred by his financial problems, Rahi pursued his goal single-mindedly and soon joined the Maharaja College of Art, Jaipur. He completed his diploma in fine arts in first division and also received a gold medal from Maharani Gayatri Devi for one of his paintings submitted at an all-India exhibition held in Jaipur. His teacher Shailendra Nath De was so impressed by his work and dedication that he recommended him to Nandlal Bose, the best known art teacher of Viswa Bharati University at Shantiniketan.

Under Nandlal's guidance, Rahi mastered different styles of painting and passed his diploma in fine arts and handicrafts from Shantiniketan in first division in 1953. He also held his first one-man show in Shantiniketan the same year. It has



"Prasadhan"

been more than four decades since Virendra Singh Rahi came out of Viswa Bharati University and there has been no looking back for him. He has won many awards and prizes and held several one-man and group shows all over India.

Rahi, who now lives in Delhi, is a very contented man who proudly declares, "My life has been full of struggle and great fulfilment simultaneously. I paint for humanity and I have thoroughly enjoyed my work. God has been very kind to me and at my age, while many people have already called it a day, I still draw and paint with the same gusto and it gives me as much pleasure and enjoyment as it used to give me fifty years ago."

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